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The single player mode of decision: Management as strategic unobservation of organization. A reply to Thomas Hirschmann.

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An answer to 'Thomas Hirschmann's shout out: *What is the function of management in an organization and is there any reason for its existence beyond mere self-management?*

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Management appears whenever we aim to observe organization as guide for or outcome of individual behavior. Organizations are systems of decision. They “consist of decisions” (Nassehi, 2005, p. 186) and nothing but decisions, with the point being that decisions are not made by individuals, but by organizations. Hard to believe? Let's imagine two persons playing Rock-Paper-Scissors. The game begins with contingent behaviors. Rock or paper or scissor, and it is only the co-occurrence of these behaviors that makes the decision. One player forming a rock is not a decision yet, right? It takes two to play the game, with the players needing to be aware of each other, too, for two isolated performances of rock, paper, or scissors would also not make a decision yet. Decision is hence not what happens in our minds or is formed by our bodies. Rather, they represent a form of communication. Decision are forms of the *mutual* irritation of individual behaviors and thus not subject to the control of the involved parties anymore.

Organizations appear if we observe chains of decision communications rather than chains of individual behaviors (Roth, 2014). Rock-Rock-Scissors-Paper-Scissors-Rock ... The

longer the chain, however, the harder it is to observe the entire chain of decisions, and the bigger the need to focus particular, e.g., particularly “typical” sequences of decisions. All observations of particular sequences decision, however, are confronted with the paradox that they represent contingent decisions themselves. “(A)ny communicative choice presupposes choice” (Andersen & Born, 2000, p. 320). There is hence no final cause for choosing either this or that sequence of decisions to guide or anticipate further decisions. Still, this form of guidance or anticipation is exactly what we expect from management. The mission of management is to guide or anticipate individual behavior in the context of organization.

Management approaches (and never completes) this mission by the observation of decision-making from the perspective and for the sake of (one of) the players involved, thus designing the roles of the players, which includes the design of management roles. In fact, players only emerge when decisions are very consequently reduced to individual behaviors. It is indeed only due to consequent forms of attention guidance that we are at all able to observe decisions, which are made by the game, as if the players had made them and as if the persons involved had chosen to play the role of the winner or the loser.

These strategies of the personalization (Roth, 2013) of decision making do not need to stop at the observation of individual behavior. Rock-Paper-Scissors is playing in both individual and collective versions. As the two players of the collective version are groups, the groups need to first agree on which of the three elements – here: Tiger-Samurai-Grandmother – to choose. Both groups then simultaneously unveil their choice to the other group and find out what decision it resulted in. The issue is that we are now

tempted to observe a game within a game, or a decision making process within a decision making process, thus making our observation oscillate between two distinct levels of analysis. However, we can resolve this paradoxical observation if we mind that a form within a form is the same form within a different medium, which is a different form of observation. In our case, this means that in observing the “group decision” game “around” the initial game, we are observing a different game, thus asking a different question and getting a different answer. In fact, the answer to the question of how the group interaction on whether and by whom to perform Tiger, Samurai, or Grandmother is linked to the later decision not much more directly than a rain dance to rainfall [cf. Stefan Kühl (2000) on nonetheless persistent forms and functions of ancient and contemporary rainmaker phenomena]. The contingency of the relationship between the observation of organization and the observation of group interaction “around” the emerging chain of decisions essentially is the reason for the on-going need for management. However, if management is to instruct either individual or collective behavior, then the circumstance that decisions are not (subject to) behavior has to be disguised. In other words: As true as it is that the game would be over before even starting if decisions were subject to (group) behavior, so too would the game stop if players or teams felt that they could not influence the decisions. This is what calls for management as the illusive idea that different forms of the observation of organization can influence the outcome of organization. Such, management is the token for the idea that players actually can play their own game (e.g., by hiding a series of losses by changing the billing period).

This strategic form of observation has its advantages. The observation of players and their behavior is much easier than the observation of the game itself, the latter of which, after just a few repetitions, already calls for advanced skills in stochastic and eventually

computer aid. Ontological heuristics, which focus on individual behavior in social context rather than on the social context of the individual behavior, of course have the advantage of reliably reducing complexity. This may be why the larger part of strategic advice for winning Rock-Paper-Scissors and other decision games is focused on observations of the players rather than on observations of the game. This advice mainly takes the role of the player and focuses on both the virtues that one needs and the traits of the other(s) that one needs to be aware of in order to outsmart the others. Cross-tables full of psychological and cultural observations draw attention to facts as important as the circumstances that rookie men have a bias towards playing the rock as compared to dominant women who of course tend to play the scissors when playing Rock-Paper-Scissors. That a group of Swiss students has a higher need for consensus than a group of US-American students if they interact on decision-making. That family businesses have less pronounced risk behavior as compared to venture capitalists. Findings of this kind may be as true as they can be. Still, the basic assumption behind them is that the respective factors impact decisions; that decisions are subject to individual or collective preferences and values; that decisions are made by anything else but the decision game itself. The cultivation of this – as illusive as indispensable – idea is the core function of management.

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